

U.S. Sees China Ready to Set Off Its First A-Blast

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Rusk Expects Peking to Test In Near Future

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Communist China may explode its first nuclear device "in the near future," Secretary of State Dean Rusk announced yesterday.

American officials said the world's most populous and revolutionarily militant nation might blast its way onto the threshold of the exclusive nuclear club with a "primitive" device in the next few days, weeks or months.

The Red Chinese nuclear explosion could be timed to coincide with the celebration in Peking on Thursday of the 15th anniversary of the Chinese People's Republic, officials noted.

More Than One Doubted

Rusk emphasized that "the detonation of a first device does not mean a stockpile of nuclear weapons and the presence of modern delivery systems."

China has the material to build more than one nuclear device initially.

By forecasting a possible Chinese nuclear blast, United States officials sought to cushion its effects, diplomatically and politically. But such

a detonation, however "primitive," would have major international implications.

Blast Not "Guaranteed"

American sources emphasized that they were not "guaranteeing" that the explosion will take place. That is a matter of political timing, plus technical ability, it was noted here.

What the United States was saying was that, in the judgment of its officials, Communist China has the physical capacity to explode a rudimentary nuclear weapon now. For four years American officials have said that the detonation would come "next year." The distinction, officials said, is that intelligence

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information indicates that the Chinese now have that capacity.

Rusk said in his announcement that if a detonation "does occur, we shall know about it and will make the information public."

The Secretary of State gave assurance that the United States "has fully anticipated the possibility of Peking's entry into the nuclear weapons field and has taken it into full account in determining our military posture and our own nuclear weapons program."

He noted, in his two-paragraph announcement, that Communist China "strongly opposed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which has been signed by over 100 countries."

"We would deplore atmospheric testing in the face of

serious efforts made by almost all other nations to protect the atmosphere from further contamination and to begin to put limitations upon a spiraling arms race," Rusk said.

The world's nuclear powers at present are the United States and the Soviet Union, with nuclear capacity and missile delivery systems more than adequate to destroy each other; Britain, with a limited nuclear capacity, and France, in the early stages of building, testing and expanding its own nuclear force.

France and Communist China were the principal signers of last year's test-ban treaty that forbids testing in the atmosphere, under water or in outer space. It permits underground nuclear testing, provided there is no radioactive fallout from it outside a nation's own territory.

An important Soviet reason for signing the treaty, and perhaps the most important reason, was to bring world pressure against the development of nuclear weapons by Communist China, now the Soviet Union's arch rival for world Communist leadership.

But there is even a larger self-interest reason than that for Soviet concern with Chinese nuclear power; the two nations have clashed publicly over territorial disputes along their vast Asian border. Red China with its adjoining 700 million people is potentially a greater physical threat to the Soviet Union than any other nation.

American officials said there is no reason to expect that the explosion of one nuclear device by Communist China could affect the test-ban treaty.

It was anticipated when the treaty was drafted, they noted, that France and Communist China probably would maintain their independent course.

Even so, American officials did not want to give absolute assurance in advance that the treaty would be unaffected by whatever Red China does, because of the outside possibility that a nuclear detonation might show that China had uncovered some new technique that could alter the world arms race. The treaty gives any signer the right to withdraw the supreme interests of its country.

United States sources emphasized the belief that the expected Chinese detonation would be an "atmospheric"

test, rather than a more technically complex underground test. This emphasis suggested that the United States has firm intelligence information to ascertain that. Officials also said they know that the

Chinese have reached a high stage of preparation and readiness for such a test.

Officials here expressed the viewpoint that a nuclear blast by Red China would produce a world reaction of more revulsion to the deed than fear of the power.

The odds are, these sources said, that the pluses and minuses for Red China in world reaction to such a development would probably cancel out each other. That conclusion, of course, is open to debate, for it is also con-

ceded that the accomplishment would surely enhance the prestige of Red China in the Communist world.

The Soviet Union gave nuclear assistance to Red China in the 1950s, but it has said it only was assisting Peking in peaceful nuclear development.